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Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)
later: Mr. Nam (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

Contents

Agenda item 108: Promotion and protection of the rights of children *(continued)*

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 108: Promotion and protection of the rights of children *(continued)* (A/52/523, A/52/348, A/52/482, A/52/437, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52,90, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/C.3/52/3)

1. **Ms. Hadar** (Israel) said that Israel had traditionally been a family-oriented society which paid particular attention to the needs of children. It had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and had also joined in the current worldwide efforts to increase public awareness of phenomena such as child abuse, child prostitution and child pornography. It should be noted, however, that the communications media could resort to exaggeration and misuse, thereby carrying potential dangers instead of serving the best interests of children.

2. The Knesset had passed legislation in early 1995 which excused minors who had been victims of sexual crimes from appearing in court. Instead, minors were interviewed by a social worker who then testified in court on their behalf. Furthermore, the Knesset had an active Children's Advocacy Committee, which represented the consensus in Israel with regard to the protection of children and sought to ensure implementation of legislation in that field. Those and other legislative measures placed Israel in a leading position around the world in promoting and protecting the rights of the child.

3. Already in the 1970s, Israel had implemented a system of children's allowances, developed Government-regulated and subsidized day-care services, introduced reforms of the educational system to increase the number of years of free and compulsory education and developed a wide range of educational programmes for various age groups. During the 1980s and early 1990s, however, new problems had arisen for the well-being of children, such as poverty, child abuse and neglect. Israel had created a single umbrella body, the Israel Association for Child Protection, which dealt with public awareness and provided a telephone hot line, therapy, shelter, educational and prevention programmes, training, research and lobbying, all in a streamlined and effective manner.

4. The National Council for the Child, which had been active since 1980, was Israel's foremost advocate of the rights of children and operated on several complementary fronts as it sought change in legislation, policy and practice. It also monitored the quality of children's services, gathered data on children at risk, served as a nationwide address for reporting violations of children's rights and protected those rights in conflicts between the interests of children and adults. In 1986, the mayor of Jerusalem had established an office of Ombudsman for children and youth, as an experimental project. In 1990 also, the National Council for the Child had taken upon itself the steady, serious responsibility of serving as an "address" for Israeli children and for agencies working on their behalf.

5. Since its establishment as a modern State, Israel had absorbed hundreds of thousands of immigrants from many different cultures. As a result, it had become the world's largest laboratory for developing programmes that dealt with problems that were typical of new immigrants, such as culture shock, child abuse and aggression in the family. The Council had been operating a special project for Russian immigrant children and young people. In 1994, another office geared specifically towards the needs of the Ethiopian immigrant community had been opened. Also in 1994, the Council had added another unit dealing specifically with children in the Arab sector of Israel following the pattern set by the unit for Russian immigrants.

6. **Mr. Boisson** (Monaco) reiterated Monaco's support for the Ottawa process, which was aimed at the complete elimination of anti-personnel mines, and noted that, while the near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child gave reason for satisfaction, further efforts were needed for the promotion and protection of those rights through the monitoring and effective implementation of the Convention. In that connection, he welcomed the establishment by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of a plan of action to provide greater support for the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to provide it with the necessary resources.

7. International Labour Organization statistics on the exploitation of child labour showed, firstly, that in order to eradicate that phenomenon it was necessary to eradicate poverty and, secondly, that the excuse of economic survival advanced by certain sectors of production lacked any basis in fact. The international community should therefore continue and intensify its mobilization and public opinion should be well informed so that it could more effectively denounce that modern form of slavery. The Oslo Conference on Child Labour, which had just been concluded with the adoption of a programme of action against child labour in the world, should help to bring about improvements in the most extreme situations.

8. The note on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/52/482) showed that no part of the world was free of that scourge and that the rapid

development of the communications media, in particular the information highway, exposed children to the dangers of commercial sexual exploitation. Now more than ever, education was the most effective instrument for prevention and awareness-building. In order to participate in the struggle against the commercial sexual exploitation of children, especially following the World Congress, held at Stockholm in 1996, the Government of Monaco had submitted to Parliament draft legislation providing for the inclusion in the criminal code of sexual exploitation of children as a crime. The early passage of that legislation would extend the jurisdiction of Monaco to any person convicted of such an act, subject only to the condition that the person should be detained in the territory of Monaco.

9. The protection and promotion of the rights of the child had always been a priority for Monaco, a State that contributed, within the limits of its possibilities, to the funding of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In that connection, he wished to draw attention to the crucial role of non-governmental organizations, such as the Monegasque Red Cross, the World Association of Children's Friends, Monaco Aide et Présence, Mission Enfance and Amitiés sans frontières, whose work on the ground and dedication provided support, complemented and even served as inspiration for Government initiatives. The international community should provide assistance so that States could increase the resources which they allocated to the improvement and expansion of education for children and adolescents. In that connection, particular attention should be paid to girl children, since, owing to the responsibilities that were placed on them at a very early age, they were frequently denied an opportunity to receive education and training, which prevented them from developing themselves and thereby perpetuated situations of exclusion and discrimination. In short, the instruments in force for the defence of human rights should guarantee the promotion of and respect for the rights of the child. As an expression of its commitment, Monaco joined other States in sponsoring the draft resolution on the rights of the child.

10. **Ms. Vadiati** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the impact of armed conflicts on children, particularly suffering, displacement, separation from their families, emotional problems, and death or injury caused by hostilities, occupation or the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines, was of special concern. International cooperation and support in that area were particularly necessary, through the transfer of technology to affected countries in order to assist them in mine clearance and the initiation of child training programmes in mine-contaminated areas.

11. In situations of armed conflict, international action was also necessary in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance reached children in need, through such measures as the observance of truce days and corridors of peace. In that context, her delegation requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to focus special attention on the situation of children in Afghanistan, who were suffering the tragic consequences of continued conflict and crisis; that question was of particular concern to the Islamic Republic of Iran, since, for 19 years, it had been hosting Afghan refugees, who currently numbered 1.5 million, two thirds of whom were women and children.

12. The problem of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, which was a flagrant violation of human rights, had gradually assumed global proportions. Poverty, illiteracy, the degradation of moral values, the breakdown of the family as an institution, the expansion of consumerism and the steady demand of users of the sexual market were the main factors responsible for the creation of a breeding ground conducive to the abuse of children. Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran had taken decisive action against prostitution, pornography, corruption, alcoholism and the use of drugs; it was also determined to ensure the health of its society through the application of legal and moral codes in the mass media with a view to preventing children from being exposed to such harmful influences as pornographic material. While supporting international efforts for the protection of the rights of the child, her delegation was convinced that such cooperation should place greater emphasis on the strengthening of the family institution, the promotion of universal education and the defence of moral and ethical values.

13. Child labour was another area that gave cause for serious concern. There, too, poverty was a root cause, although it was not the only one. National and international measures should be taken in order to expand the welfare network and curb the supply of children as cheap labour; the enforcement of existing laws and the promotion of the requisite legal framework and institutions were vital in that connection. Mention should also be made of children's education; according to UNICEF, 140 million children did not attend school. Her delegation hoped that, through the concerted efforts of the international community, one of the seven major goals of the World Summit for Children would be fulfilled, namely that at least 80 per cent of the world's school-age children would have access to basic education by the year 2000. The Islamic Republic of Iran was sparing no effort to ensure the full implementation of a constitutional provision guaranteeing free primary education for boys and

girls. It was expected that, by the year 1999, all children between 6 and 10 years of age would have access to primary education.

14. **Mr. Khryskov** (Russian Federation) said that his Government attached great importance in its social policy to the protection of children; accordingly, it was implementing the provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, and the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. It also supported the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in 1996.

15. The Russian Federation, which had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, was in favour of drawing up an optional protocol on children in armed conflicts. Such a protocol must establish 18 years as the minimum age for the recruitment of children in the armed services, and for compulsory or voluntary military service.

16. With a view to incorporating the provisions of those instruments for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child in its national legislation, the Russian Federation had promulgated laws on health, labour and the family and other legal texts concerning the protection of the rights of the child. Those texts included presidential decrees such as that on the children of Russia, which provided for special programmes for children who were handicapped, orphaned, drug victims, refugees and displaced. Within those programmes, which would be implemented until the year 2000, networks would be established for the protection of children in difficult situations, social services would be provided and measures would be adopted for the prevention of the abandonment of children and juvenile delinquency. The National Plan of Action for Children, which incorporated the goals of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children and was an integral part of the Russian Federation's social policy, contained measures for improving the situation of children and protecting them against violence, abuse, the impact of social and nationalistic conflicts and environmental disasters. Lastly, as evidence of his country's social policy for children, he cited the establishment of a special commission for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the speech delivered by the President over the radio on the protection of the rights of the country's children.

17. **Mr. Sun Ang** (China) said that serious violations of children's rights were continuing to be perpetrated, especially the use of children in armed conflicts, sexual exploitation, abduction, illegal adoption, exposure to drugs and child labour. The international community must therefore do everything possible to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that respect, his delegation supported the work that was being carried out in relation to the two optional protocols to the Convention.

18. For its part, his Government had taken steps to create a favourable social environment and protect children. Those steps ranged from the promulgation of legislation and administrative norms to the provision of support to families. The laws which had been enacted governed, *inter alia*, the protection of minors, maternal and child health, free education and adoption. It had also formulated a strategy for the development of children in the 1990s and had established coordinating agencies. As the developing country with the largest population of children in the world (300 million), China attached great importance to international cooperation for the protection of children, especially with United Nations bodies such as UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO. After signing and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, his Government had incorporated its provisions into the national strategy for protection of children, publicized them widely and incorporated them in its legislation. In addition, it had submitted reports on the implementation of the Convention to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

19. Through cooperation between the Government, society and the family, and with the support of the international community, considerable progress had been made in child protection. The cause of children would progress even more with reform and the opening of China to the outside world, and with economic and social development. His Government was willing to work with all countries and international agencies with a view to building a better future for the children of the world.

20. **Ms. Bennani** (Morocco) urged the international community to fulfil the commitments undertaken at the World Summit for Children in order to remedy the situation of the large number of children exposed to economic exploitation in many countries. Child labour was a tragedy for the developing countries because the children involved did not receive any education or training and could not make any contribution to the development and progress of those countries. In order to resolve that grave problem it was essential to eradicate the poverty which afflicted the families of those children and the society in which they lived. In a report published in 1997, UNICEF had proposed measures to eliminate the economic exploitation of children. For its

part, UNDP had estimated that the cost of poverty reduction would correspond to no more than 10 per cent of world military expenditure in 1995. In that respect, she drew attention to the work carried out by non-governmental organizations to sensitize the public and protect children against economic exploitation, and of ILO to draw up a convention prohibiting the most intolerable forms of child labour.

21. In order to combat the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, concerted programmes must be implemented at the national, regional and international levels. That scourge would be eliminated only by promoting education and sensitizing the public through the mass media.

22. The protection of the rights of the child must begin within the family, which had a fundamental role to play in child development. The Convention on the Rights of the Child envisaged a number of measures to support the family and stipulated that States must render assistance to parents, to the extent possible. Unfortunately, the economic and social difficulties experienced by some countries, especially the African countries and the least developed countries, threatened the family structure and the capacity of parents to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children.

23. The Convention, which Morocco had ratified in 1993, had contributed enormously to sensitizing the authorities, society and the mass media to the problems of Morocco's disadvantaged children. Her Government had established the objective of eliminating the obstacles which impeded the survival and protection of children in disadvantaged periurban and rural areas and improving the situation with regard to maternal mortality and girls' schooling in rural areas.

24. In order to implement the Convention, a national centre had been established which would be responsible for coordinating the national strategy for child survival and development and promoting the rights of the child, adopting initiatives to increase the effectiveness of the application of the Convention, collecting funds to improve the situation of children and establishing a data bank on the implementation of the Convention. Furthermore, her Government had begun to apply itself seriously to the issue of child labour and would ensure the access of children to education, and their health and safety. Lastly, she drew attention to the importance of bilateral and multilateral assistance to promote the cause of the rights of children by implementing the provisions of the Convention.

25. *Mr. Nam (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) took the Chair.*

26. **Ms. Abdelrazek** (Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations) said that Palestinian children had known only a life of Israeli occupation and of dispersal. They belonged to a generation of strugglers who were trying to survive the many injustices of occupation, paying a high price in the form of death, detention, psychological trauma, lack of education and handicaps. Their physical and psychological condition was being negatively affected by violent confrontations, human rights abuses, demolition of their homes, confiscation of family land, curfews, travel bans, school closures and administrative detentions. With regard to that last violation, it should be noted that Israel could detain a minor for 90 days without any visitors, and had 250 Palestinian children in its prisons. In 1996, despite the peace process, 29 children had been killed and 109 others had been injured in confrontations with the Israeli army and the Israeli settlers. In addition, the closures imposed by Israel had retarded the development of Palestinian children because they deprived the families of the income needed to care for the children, who often had to seek work.

27. In order to address the needs of children, the Ministry for Youth and Sports had established local and national departments and formulated a national plan of action which would be implemented in cooperation with the Ministries of Planning, Social Affairs and Education and with various international institutions, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and UNICEF. The Palestinian Authority had also established a Palestinian child's day and a Palestinian child's week, and with assistance from UNRWA had implemented several programmes for children and youth under which new schools and playgrounds had been built and textbooks had been provided to pupils.

28. In the light of the economic crisis in the territory, the Palestinian Authority called on the international community to increase its assistance to Palestinian children in order to improve their situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and in neighbouring Arab States. Although the peace process had seriously deteriorated, it was to be hoped that in future Palestinian children would have new opportunities for growth, learning and development.

29. **Mr. Arda** (Turkey) said that Turkey was contributing to the activities of international bodies to benefit children by organizing joint programmes and offering its own expertise in the promotion and protection of children's rights. In that respect, he welcomed the adoption of the Ashgabat Declaration and urged the international community to encourage the signatories to pursue their goals.

30. Throughout history, children had enjoyed a privileged place in Turkish society. For the eighth consecutive decade, Turkey was celebrating a children's day. Every year, hundreds of children from around the globe were invited to Turkey to participate in the 23rd of April festivities. The founder of the Republic had dedicated the anniversary of the first meeting of the Turkish Parliament in 1920 to children.

31. Turkey had started to mainstream a gender perspective into its policies and programmes in 1924 by establishing compulsory education for all Turkish children. It had signed the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1928 and was also a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, Turkey had participated in the World Summit for Children at the presidential level. Following its Parliament's ratification of the Convention, Turkey had launched a national plan of action extending compulsory education to eight years. That meant that the Turkish Government was currently offering free education to almost 14 million pupils in the 7-14 age group. His country was also providing treatment to juvenile delinquents and was planning to set up rehabilitation programmes and enact new legislation on juvenile courts. In addition, Turkey was contributing to the education, physical and mental health and protection of the culture and rights of the children of Turkish citizens living abroad and would spare no effort, at the domestic or international level, in promoting and protecting the rights of children.

32. **Mr. Pashayev** (Azerbaijan) said that throughout the world armed conflicts continued to occur, leading to suffering and grief for millions of people, particularly children. Millions of children had become refugees and displaced persons, deprived of a normal life, their families and their homes. Some children were killed by shells and landmines; others were taken hostage, imprisoned and forced to work. On the eve of the twenty-first century, the time had come to understand the feelings experienced by a child born in exile, homeless and doomed to a life of continuous misery. He highly appreciated the increased attention given by the United Nations to the problems of children in armed conflicts, as had been demonstrated in the report on the effect of armed conflict on children drawn up by Ms. Graça Machel and the appointment of the Special Representative for children and armed conflict.

33. As a result of the aggression by the Republic of Armenia against the Azerbaijani Republic and the occupation of 20 per cent of Azerbaijan's territory, a million Azerbaijanis had become refugees and internally displaced persons. During that forced displacement, which had lasted almost 10 years, a large number of children had lost their lives or had become handicapped; hundreds of them had been taken hostage and hundreds of thousands had become refugees and displaced persons. Thousands had become orphans. At the current time, 400,000 refugee children continued to struggle for survival in extremely difficult conditions. It was impossible to remain indifferent to the dire conditions of children living in tents and wagons at the side of roads. His Government was willing to cooperate with the Special Representative on children and armed conflict and hoped that he would be able to visit Azerbaijan to witness the tragic effects of the military aggression on Azerbaijani children. He urged the international community to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijani refugees and displaced persons, particularly children, and expand the scope of programmes for the children affected by the armed conflict.

34. Azerbaijan had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 21 June 1992. It was also a member of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which was essential for protecting the rights of children. With regard to the reform of the United Nations, he stressed the need to maintain the independence of UNICEF in matters relating to fund-raising, contacts with donors and accountability to them. At the same time, Azerbaijan supported the idea of greater cooperation, coordination and interaction among United Nations bodies in order to avoid duplication of effort and dissipation of resources and to meet effectively the needs of the most disadvantaged children.

35. **Mrs. Tolle** (Kenya) said that the recommendations made in the reports under consideration were quite pragmatic and should be implemented without hesitation. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified by 191 States, the international community must not relent in the fight against child abuse, particularly when media such as the Internet were being used for pornographic purposes. The use of advanced technology by offenders must be promptly halted before it got out of hand.

36. Kenya welcomed the report of the working group on the draft optional protocol to the Convention related to the involvement of children in armed conflicts and hoped that it would be adopted and subsequently ratified or acceded to by the States parties.

37. Her Government had traditionally attached great importance to the welfare and safety of children and, therefore, had been among the first countries to ratify the Convention. As part of its efforts to implement its provisions, the Government of Kenya had set up a task force on legislation relating to children, composed of representatives of all relevant governmental departments and

agencies. Furthermore, the Government had drafted a national policy paper to prepare a comprehensive bill on the rights of the child. It had also undertaken a campaign to raise public awareness in order to eradicate traditional practices and social attitudes that discriminated against girls.

38. Kenya was deeply concerned about the impact of the conflicts in all crisis areas, including Africa, on innocent children, women and men. It therefore firmly supported the search for peaceful solutions to numerous crises in the subregion. The suffering of children was not limited to conflict situations and was equally prevalent in peaceful and stable environments, where boys and girls were being sexually exploited for commercial purposes. Kenya was deeply concerned about child-sex tourism. As a tourist destination, it wished to underscore the importance of closer cooperation among countries in order to eradicate that and other illegal transnational activities which infringed the rights of children. Kenya supported the important role played by the United Nations organizations and bodies, particularly the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in assisting sub-Saharan Africa to promote and protect the rights of children. According to ILO, Africa had the highest percentage of child labourers. The problem of child labour could not be solved without tangible efforts to eradicate poverty. Children represented the future and the hope of the world. It was the paramount obligation of all States to protect them from all violation of their rights.

39. **Mr. Kumar** (India) said that the situation of children victimized by armed conflict was one of the cruellest and most tragic that existed at the current time. Nevertheless, the deliberate targeting of children in armed conflicts and their use by armed, militant, insurgent or terrorist groups as combatants or protective shields were even more reprehensible morally. Adolescents were targeted for indoctrination, recruitment and even kidnapping. The situation of unaccompanied refugee minors and girls, the latter being particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse, was of special concern. In post-conflict situations, children were the most frequent victims of landmines and were often mutilated for life. Countless others were left psychologically scarred, socially dislocated, physically and sexually abused, and deprived of any possibility of growth or development.

40. The problem of child labour remained a problem of national and international concern. In India, the Child Labour Act of 1986 prohibited the employment of children in jobs that were hazardous to their lives and health. Other initiatives and programmes undertaken during the past decade included the formulation in 1987 of a national child labour policy, the setting up of a task force on child labour, and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, programmes and plans of action were being implemented in areas with a high concentration of child labourers. India had announced a major programme in 1994 aimed at helping an estimated 2 million children working in hazardous occupations by the year 2000 (with an outlay of over $200 million), which was currently being implemented. The Supreme Court had recently passed a landmark judgement reiterating earlier decisions for free and compulsory education up to the age of 14. It also envisaged compensation to be paid by employers of child labourers together with a Government contribution which would be deposited in a child labour rehabilitation and welfare fund. India had also been participating in the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

41. The problem of child labour must be seen in perspective. Most child labour in India was first and foremost a function of poverty and the employment market, and a symptom of underdevelopment, rather than a wilful violation of the human rights of the child. Its solution, too, lay in targeted development. At the same time, priority must be given to the more extreme, exploitative and hazardous forms of child labour such as forced or bonded child labour and child prostitution, which had a clear human rights dimension.

42. As to the girl child, the victim of neglect and discrimination because of traditional mindsets which gave preference to boys, India had embarked upon a major programme to correct that situation. On the legislative side, the Indian Parliament had recently enacted laws to regulate and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic techniques in aid of female foeticide. Non-governmental organizations and representatives of civil society had been involved in raising the level of awareness regarding gender discrimination and the rights of the girl child. That rights-based approach was being reinforced by the intensification of developmental efforts. Elementary education was focusing increasingly on the girl child. Recently, his Government had announced an ambitious initiative to provide a grant at birth for every girl child born to families below the poverty line, followed by annual grants through primary and secondary school, in order to provide an incentive for the education of girls and help change attitudes in sections of society which thought of girl children as liabilities.

43. **Ms. Hettiarachchi** (Sri Lanka) said that Sri Lanka, which would sponsor the General Assembly resolution on item 108, had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and had incorporated its provisions in the children's charter. Sri Lanka had established a national

committee to monitor respect for the rights of the child and had launched an action plan for children for the period 1992-1996. The national committee was taking action on the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; the main constraints were paucity of resources, armed conflict in the north and east of Sri Lanka and terrorist attacks.

44. In Sri Lanka the maternal and infant mortality rates were among the lowest in the developing countries and the social indicators relating to children were exceptionally high; nevertheless, much remained to be done, with international support and cooperation. Sri Lanka supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the working group on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the subject. The recent worsening of the problem of child prostitution, which was causing grave concern to her Government and the public, was being combated through public information and awareness programmes with the help of non-governmental organizations. In addition, Sri Lanka had enacted legislation to tighten the laws against offenders.

45. The President had issued a directive to the presidential committee on prevention of child abuse to draw up an immediate action plan against sexual exploitation and child labour. Furthermore, the new child protection authority would be empowered to formulate policy and coordinate all activities in relation to child welfare at the district level. At the legislative level, the law commission was preparing a law on children which would consolidate all the laws pertaining to children, and would include a section to deal with the problem of sexual exploitation and child abuse.

46. Sri Lanka, whose legislation on child labour was in conformity with the Convention, had organized a national workshop on child labour, funded by ILO. At the workshop, it had been decided to implement several action programmes to eliminate child labour by 1997, which would be initiated by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training and ILO. Within the context of the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, a national steering committee had been set up. Furthermore, in order to alleviate the plight of street children, Sri Lanka had opened various centres which offered educational, nutritional and recreational facilities.

47. The problem of the protection of children affected by armed conflict, to which Sri Lanka had devoted most of its address in the general debate of the General Assembly, was of increasing concern to her Government. The terrorist separatist group known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which had been at war with the State for almost two decades, had conscripted thousands of children, kidnapping them or brainwashing them with idealized concepts of war and the cult of martyrdom.

48. Her Government, in cooperation with international non-governmental organizations and agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Save the Children Fund, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, had taken and would continue to take measures to improve the conditions of the many people who had been displaced by armed conflict in the north and east of Sri Lanka, and was making a special effort to meet the needs of children.

49. **Ms. Dorjee** (Bhutan) said that Bhutan had been one of the first States to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child without any reservations. Bhutan supported the amendment adopted by the Fourth Conference of States Parties and later approved by the General Assembly regarding the increase in the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and urged other States Parties to do likewise.

50. Bhutan had incorporated the provisions of the Convention and of other human rights instruments regarding child labour, inheritance, property ownership and early marriage into various laws. Within the context of the goals for children and development in the 1990s, the national development initiatives concentrated on the health and education sectors, and focused on women and girls. The goals of the national plan of action for children had been incorporated into all Bhutan's development plans. The increases in the budget for the education and health sectors had enabled Bhutan to progress towards those goals: between 1992 and 1997, infant mortality had decreased from 142 to 70.7 in 1,000 births; the under-five mortality rate had also dropped from 195 to 96.9 in 1,000. Universal child immunization had been maintained, and access to drinking water and sanitation had improved.

51. Bhutan had also improved primary school coverage which, coupled with measures such as social mobilization, increased capacity in some schools and continuation of the WFP feeding programme, would make it possible to maintain the minimum growth rate of 5 per cent that was necessary to meet the goal of education for all by the year 2002.

52. At the regional level, during the Decade of the Girl Child organized by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the participants in the ninth summit of the Association had decided to study the feasibility of drawing

up a regional convention to combat the crime of trafficking in women and children for prostitution. Bhutan, which supported the work of the working group on the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, would cooperate actively with other States in the region in that task.

53. **Ms. Lacanlale** (Philippines) said that the Philippines, one of the first countries to ratify the Convention, had accepted the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, and had participated in the discussions of the working groups on the optional protocols related to the involvement of children in armed conflicts and to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The Philippines had solid legislative foundations for upholding children's rights and promoting their well-being; it had reinforced its cooperation with private agencies to provide services and programmes for children, and had established a child rights centre in its commission on human rights.

54. In order to combat the problem of child labour, her Government was working with non-governmental organizations, communities, workers' organizations and employers' groups as well as children themselves. At the international level, the Philippines was participating in the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and had undertaken joint initiatives with UNICEF to promote the rights of child workers.

55. In order to promote the well-being of the large number of children who had physical, mental, emotional or social disabilities caused by poverty, disease, disasters, land mines, displacement and all forms of violence, the Philippines had submitted a draft resolution on children with disabilities to the Commission for Social Development and was gratified that the draft resolution of the General Assembly on item 108 included a section on children.

56. The Philippines also welcomed the study of the effect of armed conflicts on children prepared by Ms. Graça Machel and the presentation by the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict.

57. The especially difficult circumstances in which about 2.9 million Philippine children lived made them easy prey for the sale and trafficking of children - particularly through the Internet - and commercial sexual exploitation. At the same time, it could not be assumed that children in more prosperous countries were safer. The Philippines had promulgated legislation for the special protection of children against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination and had undertaken vigorous public information campaigns on children's issues. With the assistance of the United Kingdom and Australia, its law enforcement agencies had been able to apprehend local and foreign paedophiles. In addition, the Philippines had signed a memorandum of agreement with Australia for joint action to combat child sexual abuse and other serious crimes and, along with the Government of Sweden, had implemented a bilateral programme of rehabilitative services for victims of those crimes and for juvenile delinquents.

58. In the context of the valuable report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/52/482), the Philippines took note with interest of the critical role which could be played by the media and education and also emphasized the indispensable role of parents, guardians and the family in providing the necessary guidance and creating an appropriate environment for child development.

59. *Mr. Busacca (Italy) resumed the Chair.*

60. **Ms. Durán** (Venezuela) expressed appreciation for the valuable report of the Special Rapporteur and said that, in that context, the communications media and education had to be used in the right proportions in preventing child abuse and rehabilitating the victims of such abuse. The situation of those children was disturbing because the judicial system was not always effective in alleviating their physical and psychological suffering and in punishing the culprits. For that reason, the international community must make efforts to classify that crime and strengthen judicial cooperation, taking into account the recommendations of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Sweden in 1996.

61. Venezuela supported the work of the working group of the Commission on Human Rights on drafting an optional protocol to the Convention related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and stressed the need to cover aspects of child sexual abuse which were not always associated with profit.

62. In view of the devastating consequences of armed conflicts for children, the international community must work in unison to prevent conflicts and firmly condemn the use of children as soldiers and other practices which were prejudicial to children. Venezuela called on the international community, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR and UNICEF to provide all necessary support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict.

63. Venezuela had tried to combine the policy of macroeconomic adjustment which it had had to apply to overcome its economic crisis with social programmes

designed to counteract the undesirable effects for the child population; those programmes covered the spheres of education, health and nutrition, and involved an investment of $683 million, a figure which represented 1.52 per cent of the gross domestic product. It was also carrying out a process of decentralization which had benefitted children.

64. Following the integral model established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Venezuela had a programme of local networks for the protection of children and adolescents which had been developed by the national children's institute in conjunction with local governments to combat, with the participation of society, discrimination or violations of the rights of boys, girls and adolescents who were in vulnerable situations, children subjected to labour or sexual exploitation, working children and street children.

65. In addition, a national debate had been held in Venezuela, with the participation of the public authorities and civil society, to bring in line with the principles of the Convention the following aspects of the child protection act: recognition of the rights of expression, self-defence and association, and the right to a hearing, for boys, girls and adolescents; the concept of boys, girls and adolescents as subjects rather than objects of law; the elimination of the concept of a "minor", regarded as pejorative; and the application of the act to the entire infant and youth population, and not just part of it.

66. Within the context of the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Venezuela had submitted its first periodic report in June 1997, in accordance with article 44 of the Convention; in addition, Venezuela had accepted the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2 of the Convention, believing that the increase in the number of members of the Committee would help improve the effectiveness of its work.

67. **Ms. Mohamed** (Yemen) said that although the ratification of the Convention and its protocols by 191 States should be a source of satisfaction, as were also the World Summit for Children held in New York and the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm, it was discouraging that the problems of children had worsened. Apart from poverty, illiteracy and illness, children were suffering as a result of armed conflicts, injuries caused by mines, displacements, prostitution, labour exploitation and living on the street. According to United Nations estimates, 250 million children were being exploited in the developing countries by being forced to work and millions of children were living in absolute poverty.

68. Although society offered children modern technology, pre and post natal medical care and educational possibilities, it also violated their fundamental rights. Yemen believed that, in order to remedy that tragic situation, a unified and firm position must be taken with regard to the implementation of the Convention. In addition, the formulation of national plans and their implementation would help create a favourable social, economic, political, health, educational and family environment for children, in both developed and developing countries. In that respect, Yemen agreed with UNICEF (whose Executive Board it would join in 1998) that education played a primary role as an investment in the future which would allow children to confront adverse social phenomena.

69. Children in Yemen were raised according to Arab customs, which taught them moral values and love. In that connection, Yemen was strengthening the role of the family as the nucleus of psychological stability and defence against external threats. Children had the right to free education and comprehensive medical care during the 1990s, which was available in more than 90 per cent of the country. Vaccination programmes were also conducted with the assistance of UNICEF. There were also numerous health centres for mothers and children as well as many local charitable associations. Finally, educational centres and technical institutions helped young people to become more integrated into all aspects of practical life.

70. In Yemen's view, the essential requirements for securing a decent life for its children were economic and political stability, poverty alleviation, increased family incomes and improvements in education. Accordingly, those were the objectives which Yemen was seeking to achieve through its political and development plans.

71. **Mr. Chiranond** (Thailand) said that, on 14 April 1997, Thailand had made a statement at the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights to protest the inaccurate statistics contained in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (E/CN.4/1997/95). Indeed, using sources of doubtful reliability, the report stated in table 1 and in paragraph 69 that in three cities of Thailand the number of adolescents engaged in prostitution was between 150,000 and 240,000. The report also claimed that, in the country as a whole, one out of every five girls between the ages of 11 and 17 could be a prostitute. In his view, those figures were patently absurd.

72. Based on the official correspondence on the subject which the Third Committee maintained with the Special Rapporteur, the latter had provided more detailed and reliable information in her interim report to the Committee (A/52/482). Paragraph 25 of that report stated that there were

150,000 to 200,000 prostitutes in the country, of which no more than 20 per cent were children. However, the corrigendum to the report (E/CN.4/1997/95/Corr.1) was still unsatisfactory, as it merely stated that the last sentence of paragraph 69 should be deleted. Since the reason for the deletion had not been indicated, a note of clarification was needed to enable other members of the Organization and the public in general to correct any misperceptions that might have arisen from the Special Rapporteur's interim report. Thailand noted that the report of the Secretary-General on the traffic in women and girls (A/52/355) made no reference to the corrigendum and requested that the latter should be included in all references to the report in future United Nations documents.

73. The Government of Thailand collaborated with various non-governmental organizations to suppress trafficking and exploitation for purposes of prostitution, which were the most serious social problems in the country. During the previous year, the Government had enacted legislation to increase penalties for the sexual abuse of minors and to punish parents who sold their children into prostitution. It had also increased the number of years of compulsory schooling from 6 to 9 and had begun to provide occupational training to women and young people in economically depressed regions in order to provide them with alternative sources of income. In addition, the Government had launched a public education campaign with a view to changing society's attitude towards prostitution and reducing support for the industry. As part of those programmes, brochures had been distributed to discourage sexual tourism. Lastly, the Government of Thailand would do everything in its power to put an end to the sexual exploitation of children, which was a violation of human rights and a criminal offence.

74. **Mr. Seriwa** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that children were the most vulnerable group of society and the international community should therefore intensify its efforts to ensure the promotion and protection of their rights and to raise their standard of living. In order to achieve that objective, it was first necessary to defend the spiritual and religious values of the society and the family unit by providing guidance to parents in the raising and education of their children.

75. Despite the fact that many countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the situation of many children remained critical. In many countries, particularly the developing countries, child labour had very harmful consequences for children because it denied them access to education and placed them in danger in the case of certain occupations. In Africa, wars and natural disasters exposed children to violence, displacement and disability. In the south of Lebanon, like in the occupied Palestinian territory, children were subject to detention and even torture.

76. The report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/52/482) addressed that problem and appealed to the international community to protect the victims. The study undertaken by Ms. Machel of the impact of armed conflicts on children also revealed that children suffered horribly in times of war, especially as a result of their forced recruitment into armies.

77. The laws of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, which were based on the principles of Islam, guaranteed protection from and care and shelter against exploitation at work, as well as free education and social services for children. However, the sanctions imposed by the Security Council created enormous difficulties for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, since they impeded the entry of medicines and food into the country. Moreover, the delay in the granting of permits for sending ill persons abroad had worsened the situation of many children. The Government was therefore urging the international community to alleviate the sanctions.

78. **Ms. Aghadjanian** (Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, rejected the accusations made by the delegation of Azerbaijan concerning aggression and occupation of areas of its territory by Armenia. While she was of the view that the question of Nagorny Karabakh should not be discussed in the Third Committee because the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was seized of the matter, she felt obliged to clarify a number of issues. The refugees who had gone to Armenia during the war in Nagorny Karabakh and those persons who had moved within the country to escape the bombardment from Azerbaijan represented 12 per cent of Armenia's current population. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that there were 50,000 refugees under the age of 15 in Armenia, who had been brutally expelled from their homes in Azerbaijan. Many of those children needed food and medical attention. However, for the past five years Armenia had been subject to a strict blockade imposed by Azerbaijan.

79. **Mr. Amirbekov** (Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement made by his delegation reflected the position of his Government with regard to the impact of the armed conflict on children. Azerbaijan could not ignore such a large number as 400,000 displaced and refugee children, who could not return to their homes nor have a normal childhood as a result of the

territorial ambitions of Armenia. His delegation considered that the atrocities committed by Armenian groups against the children of Azerbaijan were an appropriate subject for discussion in the Third Committee. In political terms, Armenia's aggression and the separatist movement which it had fomented in Nagorny Karabakh, a region of Azerbaijan, formed part of a strategy to attach that region to the territory of Armenia.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.